

# A Desert Gas Station

The Englishman was driving and had been for five hours. It would soon be the American's turn at the wheel.

The conversation was work related as it pretty much always was with these two.

"And you were in that thing with Karloff, based on one of Poe's. I liked the adaptation but the technicolor was harsh!"

"Yes, I know it was but that was what we had in those days. The sound quality was good enough anyway."

"Yes. I remember. Sometimes we could get good sound."

The road was straight and had mostly been straight for miles and miles and miles. It was one of the longest, straightest, loneliest roads in America. On and on through the desert.

"You know, this is one of longest, straightest, loneliest roads in America. The narrator just said so."

The Englishman chuckled. "You're still getting that narrator in your head thing?"

The American nodded. "Since no-one but me can hear him I suppose he must be in my head."

"What voice does he have?"

"Oh he's youthful, British and speaks in a mumbling, distracted way over the sound of a clattering computer keyboard."

"That's not a narrator. That's an author writing the events happening to us."

The American considered this, pursing his lips and moving his head from side to side as though physically weighing up the different views. "Perhaps you're right. If he is the author then he needs to put a gas station somewhere along this road soon or we'll be stranded."

"There's a rest stop and gas station marked on the map".

"Good. Good. I don't want to end up walking through the desert like that character I played in "Gun Town. Eating rattlesnakes".

They both laugh at the memory of absurd characters they've played in b-movies and television shows.

"It was unusual," remarked the Englishman "that you got cast in a western for once. We both usually get the monster things."

"Oh yes," drawled the American "We've terrified America again and again, as ghouls and vampires and werewolves and evil scientists."

"And magicians and lurking boogiemens and psychotic killers and aliens and zombies."

"And the list goes on and on. Yes, we're superior villains indeed. Bad men who feel no qualms about haunting the guilty or enslaving the innocent!"

The both laugh and the car rolls along the highway. A lonely ribbon paved into a desolate landscape under a sky filled with blue emptiness. This nothing place in the middle of Nevada. They laugh again as a roadrunner passes them going in the opposite direction.

The Englishman pulls the car over to the side of the road. "Your turn to drive" he says.

They get out and then back into the car again, having changed places.

The journey resumes.

"Y'know, " remarks the Englishman "A lawyer was telling me that there are no towns in Nevada". He takes a drink from a carton of fruit juice. "I argued with him on the subject. I said what about all those historical ghost towns from the gold mining craze in the 19th Century? He said that, legally, ghost towns are not towns as such".

"Well, they're not towns anymore" said the American.

"No. I suppose they're not towns anymore, but they're still historical towns".

"Oh, you British love history don't you? But lawyers don't love history. Why half their job is burying the past".

"Yes, I suppose so, but I said to this lawyer, I said what about villages? What about places where people live which are not part of a city? There are such places in Nevada, aren't there? And this lawyer says to me, bold as brass, that those places are not towns or villages".

The American nodded and "Hmmed" to show that he was listening.

"So I said, well, if there are people living there and they're not in a city or a town or a village what would you call such a place? And he says, quite seriously, that those places are called 'unincorporated communities'. Apparently it's a law in Nevada that you can't have villages or towns. You can only have cities and 'unincorporated communities'."

The American nodded, "That does sound like the legalese dialect of English".

The Englishman nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, and then it hit me! Tax dodge city!!!"

They both laughed again. "Tax dodge city!!" They chorused.

"Oh dear," intoned the American, ruefully, "We had better not let anyone from The Mob hear you saying that or you could find yourself sleeping with Salvador Dali and all the other little fishes".

The Englishman turned his head slightly and frowned. "You're a strange man my friend".

"We both are," replied the American.

They continued on down the seemingly endless road. They talked about gloom and they talked about doom. They talked about mysterious and they talked about dramatic denouement. They talked about Lugosi and Karloff. They talked about Kubrick and Hitchcock. They talked about the Creature from the Black Lagoon and about the Invisible Man.

"Of course now we have more and more of the slashers and the serial killers," said the Englishman, "less of the supernatural".

"Oh no, I think there are still lots of supernatural ones. I played a demon in an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer", argued the American.

"Yes, I was in an episode of Supernatural as a fallen angel turned nasty. But what do they make us do in these shows?"

"Rip and tear and slash and carve and torture," agreed the American.

"There you are," nodded the Englishman, "We're meat carving machines these days. I've played Shakespeare and Dickens, for goodness sake".

"I've played Twain and Steinbeck" replied the American, dolefully.

The car made a sputtering noise and then returned to normal functioning. Turkey Buzzards circled overhead.

"Oh thank goodness!" exclaimed the Englishman, as they both saw a gas station up ahead.

The American drove onto the gas station forecourt and pulled up to the pump. The Englishman got out and began filling the tank.

The American went into the little convenience store, he nodded to the smart looking young man who stood behind the counter. He began looking at refreshments and trinkets. "Thank god you're here or we would've been stranded!" he said.

"That's what everybody tells me" said the young man "And you're right to thank God. I like to think that we're doing the Lord's work". He smiled sweetly.

The American nodded from nothing more than politeness and began considering the array of candy bars and snack products.

"On your way to Vegas?" asked the young man.

"Oh. Yes, but Paradise really. We'll be catching a plane at Harry Reid airport and travelling on to L.A.".

The young man pursed his lips, nodded, considered this. "Bound for Paradise! That's nice". They both chuckled.

"I'm surprised you didn't fly all the way to L.A.X.," commented the young man.

"My companion is an Englishman. He wanted to experience the long desert road as background experience for a movie. We're actors".

"Heh. I thought I recognised you from somewhere! You've been on T.V. haven't you?"

"Yes, my companion and myself have both been on T.V. a few times".

"Heh. I thought so!"

The Englishman had finished filling the tank and crossed the forecourt, entered the small convenience store. "My goodness it's hot" he said.

"Yes sir. That's the desert for you" said the young man.

"Ha! Yes, of course. Foolish of me. There is much in what you say!" The Englishman came and stood next to his friend, looking at the candy and snacks.

The young man grinned. the Englishman spoke exactly the way an Englishman was supposed to speak.

"So you're both T.V. actors then?"

"Yes," said the Englishman, "T.V. and movies and so on". He smiled the smile of an actor meeting his audience, remembering in which pocket he had his pen and notebook, in case he was to be asked for an autograph.

"What kind of movies?" asked the young man.

"Well, in recent years we've both been in exotic productions of the strange and the surreal" replied the Englishman.

The American laughed and interjected "He's making it sound grander than it is. We both play monsters in monster movies and horrors in horror films".

The Englishman looked scornfully at his companion. "Must you express things in the most demeaning ways? We're still artists! We're still striving for excellence in our work!"

"That's right my old friend!" laughed the American, "Excellence in the stabbing, finesse in the torture, supremacy in the flesh tearing and the hell raising!"

All that the young gas station attendant could do for a moment was stare in amazement and softly breathe the word "Gosh!"

He stared at the two actors and then, recovering himself, said "Well, I'm honoured to meet you both!" He looked at them with a broadening smile on his face and then asked "You've seen enough of the desert for a while I expect?"

"Yes. Yes indeed. Oh God, I'm tired" the Englishman said. "I noticed you have some motel style rooms".

"Yes sir. We're too small for a real motel but we've got a couple of rooms where travellers can take a rest for a while".

The Englishman turned to his friend and said "I would dearly love to take a nap for a couple of hours before we continue on to the airport".

"Me too," replied the American, "Let's do that". He turned to the attendant and asked about prices.

After they had paid for their gas and some soft drinks and the room they allowed the young man to lead them to the rear of the gas station where they found two small but modern looking cabins.

He unlocked the door of the first cabin, revealing an extremely dark interior. "Step inside gents" he said with the air of a carnival showman, "You'll easy find the switch".

They stepped into the dark cabin and stumbled a bit, feeling on the wall for a light switch.

Then they stumbled again and this time fell about fifteen feet down in darkness. They both hit the concrete floor painfully and the Englishman felt his thighbone crack as his elbow also smashed agonisingly against the concrete. He groaned in pain and confusion. The American was silent.

Above them the young man switched on the light. He was staring down at them from the doorway.

They were in a hollowed out concrete space which had been disguised by the fake cabin above. The American appeared to be unconscious and bleeding, or perhaps he was dead.

The Englishman looked up in confusion with tears in his eyes.

"Yes sir!" said the Young Man, "The Lord's work!" He switched off the light and slammed the door, locking it. He walked away whistling a merry tune.